

KANT ON REPRESENTATION AND OBJECTIVITY

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CHAPTER I

Representation

As noted in the introduction, the B-Deduction is so complex that it is important to have a synoptic view of the reasoning at the heart of Kant's argument before descending into the intricacies of the text. The purpose of this first chapter is to begin providing such a synoptic view, via a discussion of Kant's notion of representation. What I am attempting to do here is to make certain conceptual connections appear as intuitive and compelling as I can. As I hope to show in the later chapters of this book, this will help to make intelligible what may otherwise appear to be a series of bewildering *non sequiturs*.

The notion of a representation (*Vorstellung*) is fundamental to Kant's epistemological theory, just as the notion of an idea is fundamental to the theories of his Cartesian and empiricist predecessors. The *Critique*, after all, is a text centrally concerned with what types of representations we have, how we get them, and what we do with them when we have got them. However, despite the crucial role it plays in his arguments, Kant pays little attention directly to the abstract notion of representation in general – tending to concentrate instead on more specific notions like objectivity, cognition and judgment. There is nothing in the *Critique* to compare, for example, with the rich material to be found in the writings of Leibniz on notions like expression and isomorphism. In other words, the notion of representation tends to be treated as a primitive notion in Kant's epistemology. There are therefore no key analyses or definitions in the *Critique* upon which an interpretation of Kant's notion of representation can be grounded. Hence, such an interpretation must instead be justified by its capacity to provide a coherent understanding of Kant's text as a whole. Consequently, this chapter on Kant's notion of representation is the least textually focused of the book. The main evidence for the interpretative hypotheses advanced here will come in the following chapters, as I show how this understanding of representation can help to make sense of the central argument of the B-Deduction.

The main hypothesis advanced in this chapter is, in summary, as follows. Kant is a representationalist, by which I mean that he holds that the immediate objects of consciousness are internal representative states. However, although he shares this representationalist starting point with an indirect realist like Descartes and an idealist like Berkeley, Kant nonetheless has a very different conception of what it is to represent an object. For Kant our internal states constitute the *medium* of representation and to represent an object is to be aware of something *in* that medium. What precisely this means, and the crucial differences such an understanding of representation makes, is explained below.

REPRESENTATIONALISM

Kant announces his representationalist starting point in the opening sentence of the Introduction in B, where he writes as follows.

There is no doubt whatever that all our cognition begins with experience; for how else should the cognitive faculty be awakened into exercise if not through objects that stimulate our senses and in part themselves produce representations, in part bring the activity of our understanding into motion to compare these, to connect or separate them, and thus to work up the raw material of sensible impressions into a cognition of objects that is called experience? (B1)

This passage shows that Kant thinks of the mind (or, the 'cognitive faculty') as occupied in the first place with its own internal representations or impressions. As even a superficial acquaintance with the text reveals, the Cartesian language used in this opening passage runs through the entire *Critique*. Much like Cartesian ideas, Kantian representations are 'in us', are 'determinations' (*Bestimmungen*) or 'modifications' (*Modificationen*) of our mind, and, as the quoted passage indicates, are the objects of a great variety of mental acts. We are, for example, conscious or aware of representations, and variously compare, combine, recognise, synthesise and employ them.

In thus holding that the immediate objects of consciousness or awareness are internal representations, Kant stands in the great Cartesian tradition of representationalism. The origins of this tradition lie in Descartes's rejection of the Aristotelian-Scholastic ontology and its accompanying account of human cognition. In standard Scholastic doctrine, human cognition occurred through, firstly, the reception of the 'sensible forms' or 'intentional species' of objects into the mind, and secondly, the performing of acts of

abstraction upon those sensible forms.¹ This doctrine, in which the human mind becomes formally identical with the object of cognition, was accused of being unintelligible mystification by the ‘New Philosophy’ of the seventeenth century. Leibniz, for example, in the preface to his *New Essays*, writes scornfully of the Scholastics’ ‘“intentional species” which travel from objects to us and find their way into our souls’. ‘If that is acceptable,’ he writes, ‘“everything will now happen whose possibility I used to deny” (Ovid)’.² Kant repeats this stock rejection in § 9 of the *Prolegomena*, where he writes that it is ‘incomprehensible how the intuition of a thing that is present should allow me to cognise it the way it is in itself, since its properties cannot migrate over into my power of representation’ (4:282). Such ‘migration’ of properties is precisely what was supposed to occur in the Scholastic account. In the new representationalist view of cognition, it was thought instead that all we have immediately available to our consciousness is the internal effects of objects upon our senses – that is, our ideas, impressions or representations.³

Descartes’s treatment of ideas combines many themes, but the ontological core of his view is that ideas are *modes* of the mind.⁴ This Cartesian terminology is echoed in Kant’s own usage. He writes, for example, that ‘modification of our sensibility is the only way in which objects are given to us’ (A139/B178), and (as pointed out above) repeatedly talks of representations as being ‘modifications of the mind’ (see, e.g., A97) or equivalently as ‘determinations of the mind’ (see, e.g., A34/B50). These internal modifications or determinations are then the immediate objects of awareness. The following analogy may help in understanding this jargon. Imagine a hollow globe of soft opaque plastic. The exterior surface of the globe is acted on by external forces and in response takes on various shapes. In the Cartesian and Kantian terminology, each particular shape the globe comes to take on is a *mode* or *modification* of its capacity to receive shapes (its ‘receptivity’, as it were). This receptivity is a capacity or faculty in the Aristotelian sense of being a range of potentialities that can be actualised (in this case, by

¹ For an overview of Scholastic accounts of cognition, see E. Stump, ‘The Mechanisms of Cognition: Ockham on Mediating Species’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham*, ed. P. V. Spade (Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 168–203.

² G. W. F. Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding*, trans. Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett (Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 61.

³ For useful accounts of the motivation for representationalism, see J. P. Carriero, ‘The First Meditation’, in *Descartes’s Meditations*, ed. V. Chappell (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), pp. 1–31, and M. Ayers, *Locke*, vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 1991), part 1.

⁴ On the complexities and ambiguities of Descartes’s notion of an idea, see R. McRae, ‘“Idea” as a Philosophical Term in the Seventeenth Century’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 26 (1965), 175–90, and N. Jolley, *The Light of the Soul* (Oxford University Press, 1990), ch. 2.

the external forces). Or, in the equivalent jargon of 'determinations', we could say that the plastic globe is *determinable* in various ways (i.e., can take on a range of shapes), and in a particular case is *determined* by an external force to take on a certain *determination* (i.e., a certain shape). Let us now imagine a viewer placed within this opaque plastic globe. All she can observe are the internal shapes formed by the globe in response to the external forces. That is, all that is available to her consciousness are the globe's modifications or determinations. The position of this viewer inside the globe is thus analogous to the position of the mind in a representationalist epistemology.

It might be suggested that this analogy of the viewer inside the globe helps to make one thing blindingly obvious, namely, that representationalism is a peculiarly blatant example of the so-called 'homunculus fallacy'.⁵ That is, internal representations need a subject – a 'homunculus' – to grasp, or use, or be aware of them. But then this homunculus must itself have its own internal representations and will thus contain a further homunculus, and so on *ad infinitum*. The charge is, in other words, that a theory holding that internal representations mediate the awareness of external things must thereby be committed to holding that further representations are required to mediate the awareness of the former representations, and is thus involved in a vicious infinite regress.

This charge of fallacy, however, does not hold against the views discussed here, for it is based upon a misunderstanding of both the problem to which representationalism is addressed, and the sort of solution it is intended to provide. Certainly, if representationalism were intended as a reductive analysis of awareness or representation, then it would indeed be guilty of the homunculus fallacy. That charge of fallacy is, after all, simply a dramatic way of pointing towards a circularity of explanation. However, it seems clear that Kant and the other major figures in the representationalist tradition think of the capacity to represent as a primitive property of the mental. Hence, what motivates them is not a felt need to provide a reductive analysis or explanation of the notion of representation itself. As pointed out above, the central motivation for the postulation of internal representations in fact lies in the rejection of the Scholastic account of cognition. For the Scholastics, the mind as it were reaches right out to the objects themselves, by becoming formally identical with them. With this kind of immediate contact between mind and object rejected as unintelligible, it seemed to the representationalist thinkers that the only possible basis for the cognition

⁵ See D. Dennett, *Brainstorms* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1978), pp. 122ff.

of objects could be the effects of those objects upon the mind (i.e., the mind's own modifications). But there is no reason why the mind should not have the immediate access to its own modifications that is ruled out in the case of external objects. Hence, the representationalists can take the step of postulating internal representations as the immediate objects of consciousness, without thereby falling into any regress. In other words, only one 'homunculus' – the mind itself – is required, and there is therefore no fallacy.

Representationalist views are sometimes accused of a further supposed error, namely, that of 'reifying' representations, and it is worth briefly discussing this accusation. To recapitulate, by the term 'representationalism' I mean that family of epistemological theories committed to the core belief that the immediate objects of consciousness are the mind's own ideas, impressions, or representations. In such theories, consciousness or awareness is, in other words, conceived of as being primarily reflexive in nature. This, however, does not entail that the mind's ideas, impressions, or representations are independent entities. To say that an idea is 'the object of my awareness' is simply a grammatically convenient way of saying that the idea is 'that which I am aware of'. It is not the same as saying that an idea is an object *per se*, in the sense of being an entity that could exist independently of the mind. As pointed out above, in the Cartesian model followed by Kant, ideas or representations are not internal entities but rather internal states. That is, they are modes or modifications of the mind, or ways in which the mind exists. In such a model, representations are therefore not reified into independent entities, but instead have an 'adjectival' mode of being. They could be compared with other states of a subject, such as a state of irritation. The subject can become reflexively aware of being in this state, and can thereby make the state an object of consciousness, but this does not entail that the state of irritation is an independent entity. Hence, whether or not the reifying of ideas is an error, it is not a necessary consequence of accepting representationalism. Whilst no doubt representationalists like Hume and (perhaps) Berkeley do think of ideas as independent entities, there seems no reason to think that Kant is committed to such a view.

There is one more error that representationalist epistemologies are sometimes accused of that I will also pause briefly to dismiss. This is the claim that representationalism is wrong for the simple reason that we are usually aware of external things (like cats) and not of internal things (like our ideas of cats). As G. E. M. Anscombe puts it: 'When one reads Locke, one wants to protest: "The mind is not employed about ideas, but about

things – unless ideas are what we happen to be thinking about”⁶. This protest, although tempting, is not a valid criticism of representationalism, for it is, in effect, simply a repetition of the truism that when I think about X it is X itself that I am thinking about, and not some proxy that stands in for it. Representationalism is not an absurd attempt to deny this truism by asserting that, despite appearances, we really spend all our time thinking about our own internal states – it is, rather, an attempt to provide a philosophical account of just how it is possible for us to think about X itself.

Now, it should be mentioned here that, despite the language used throughout the *Critique*, there have been some attempts to deny that Kant is a representationalist, and to interpret him as being instead some kind of direct realist. In direct realism, representations or ideas are not thought of as being themselves the immediate objects of awareness, but instead as constituting the act or state of awareness itself. Hence, at least in the case of veridical perception, the immediate object of awareness is the external thing itself and not a representation of that thing. Richard Aquila, one of the proponents of this sort of reading of Kant, puts this point as follows.

Cognitive states [i.e., representations], in the sense that was new with Kant, are not cognitive relations with objects, nor are they themselves peculiar objects supposed to mediate the occurrence of cognitive relations. They are simply the perceiver's awareness of possible objects.⁷

Derk Pereboom also endorses a direct realist reading of Kant, claiming that ‘for [Kant] the immediate object of awareness is always the ordinary object and not some special object’, and that therefore, for example, ‘Intuitions . . . are the immediate awarenesses of . . . ordinary objects’, rather than themselves objects of awareness.⁸ A third attempt to see Kant as a direct realist is Arthur Collins's *Possible Experience*, in which he writes that, according to Kant, ‘Having representations *is* our way of apprehending perceivable objects . . . we are conscious, in the first place, not of *them*, but of . . . outer things’.⁹

The fundamental problem with this direct realist reading of Kant is that it does not do justice to his use of an ‘act-object’ grammar in talking of representations. As mentioned above, Kant persistently talks of representations as being themselves the objects of our mental acts – as objects of

⁶ G. E. M. Anscombe, ‘The Intentionality of Sensation: A Grammatical Feature’, in her *Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), p. 5.

⁷ R. E. Aquila, *Representational Mind* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), p. xi.

⁸ D. Pereboom, ‘Kant on Intentionality’, *Synthese* 77 (1988), 326, 338.

⁹ A. W. Collins, *Possible Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 35.

consciousness or awareness, as well as of a great variety of other mental acts. Kant's language thus constantly implies that for him, as for most of the major philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (such as Descartes, Malebranche, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley and Hume), human cognition is understood as involving the mind's reflexive grasp of its own internal representations. Hence, to read the *Critique* as expressing a direct realism is, at most, to compose a variation on a Kantian theme rather than to seek to understand the historical Kant. In fairness, it should be said that the direct realist reading of Kant is largely motivated by an attempt to do justice to the *anti*-Cartesian themes that are clearly evident in the *Critique*. One of the things I hope to show in this book is that it is possible to do justice to those themes, whilst nonetheless taking Kant's representationalism seriously.

If the historical Kant is thus a representationalist, it must now be asked how he answers the obvious and fundamental question that any such epistemology faces, namely, how it is possible to cognise external objects, given that all that is immediately available to the mind is its own internal representations. That is, having denied the immediacy of contact between mind and world that is provided by the Scholastic account, representationalism needs an account of how any contact at all can be re-established. Put in its most general terms, the problem is this. Our cognition is, most usually, not of our own internal states, but of a world that is, in an important sense, independent of us. A representationalist epistemology needs to account for this intuitively obvious fact. It thus needs to explain how the mind's awareness of its own internal states can yet amount to, or provide the basis for, an awareness of an independent reality. At least two familiar models for understanding this can be found in the representationalist tradition. The first I shall call the 'indirect realist' model, and the second the 'idealist' model. By 'indirect realism' I mean a position that thinks of representing objects as involving (i) an act of awareness of an idea (or representation, impression, etc.) and (ii) an inference to the external cause of that idea. By 'idealism' I mean a position that thinks of representing objects as involving (i) an act of awareness of an idea and (ii) constructive acts in which that idea is linked with other ideas.

In the indirect realist model of cognition, the ideas or representations are thought to stand for external things via a relation of natural resemblance or symbolism, and in the case of veridical perception the ideas are caused in us by the influence of external things. Our knowledge of external things is thus indirect, in that it is mediated by the ideas, which are as it were clues to, or evidence for, the external things that act on our senses. An

epistemology of this sort is often associated with the views of Descartes and Locke (although whether or not this is an accurate interpretation of those thinkers is a moot question). Marjorie Grene, for example, writes that Descartes holds that 'it is through judgment . . . that I stretch my ideas from their own undoubted existence as modes of mental life and take them to be copies of things outside'.¹⁰ As this quote makes clear, on an indirect realist model our judgments about the external world become hypothetical identifications of the causal origins of our own ideas. It is through such an act of judgment/inference that the mind breaks through the so-called 'veil of ideas' and re-establishes contact with independent reality.

In the idealist model of cognition, by contrast, the ideas do not signify or stand for something beyond themselves. Instead, the things of the external world are identified with or constructed out of ideas (whether actual or possible), and veridical perceptions are those complex arrays of ideas that obey certain rules of coherence and consistency. On this model (famously propounded by Berkeley) being aware of reality is not a question of *leaping beyond* one's ideas through an inference to their causes, as in the previous model. Rather, it is a question of *enriching* the content of one's ideas by connecting them with one another. This is clear in Berkeley's *A New Theory of Vision*. He argues there that through an unconscious process of 'suggestion' our two-dimensional visual ideas are linked with tactual ideas, via habits of association built up through experience, to produce our experience of a three-dimensional world. The ideas are, as Berkeley puts it, 'most closely twisted, blended, and incorporated together'.¹¹ It is through this unconscious, constructive process that our reflexive awareness of our own inner states comes to have the richness of the perceived world.

This picture of the contrast between the indirect realist and idealist models of representing objects is of course simplified. It is offered only with the aim of pointing out some well-known landmarks in the philosophical landscape, in order to help locate Kant's views in relation to them. Perhaps the most straightforward way to sum up the contrast presented here is to say that it is the contrast between thinking of our knowledge of the world as either *inferred from* or *reduced to* knowledge of our own representations or ideas. If we now turn to the secondary literature on Kant, it is possible to find commentators who read him as an indirect realist and those who read him as an idealist (as I am using those terms). A clear example of the former can be

¹⁰ M. Grene, *Descartes*, 2nd edn (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), p. 10.

¹¹ G. Berkeley, *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision*, § 51, in *A New Theory of Vision and Other Writings* (London: J. M. Dent, 1910), p. 35. Cf. G. C. Hatfield and W. Epstein, 'The Sensory Core and the Medieval Foundations of Early Modern Perceptual Theory', *Isis* 70 (1979), 379–82.

found in Paul Guyer's *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge*. That Guyer views Kant as committed to some kind of indirect realism comes out particularly clearly in his discussion of the Second Analogy. According to Guyer, the problem of the Analogy is how we pass from knowledge of our subjective mental states (i.e., our representations) to knowledge of objective states of affairs. And Guyer explicitly treats this problem as a question of how we can be justified in making inferences based on the evidence constituted by our representations. As Guyer remarks, for Kant we make 'judgments about empirical objects . . . on the basis of our representations of them'.¹² An explicit example of an interpretation of Kant as holding to the idealist model is given by Jonathan Bennett in *Kant's Analytic*, who writes that 'Kant thinks that statements about phenomena are not merely supported by, but are equivalent to, statements about actual and possible sensory states'.¹³ That is, according to Bennett, Kant thinks that our knowledge of the (phenomenal) world reduces to knowledge of our own representations, or 'sensory states'.

The secondary literature thus contains interpretations of Kant as an indirect realist and as an idealist (I am not saying that Guyer and Bennett are the only such readings – I use them simply as illustrative examples). However, it is well known that both interpretations face some major problems. Firstly, the interpretation of Kant as an indirect realist seems plainly to contradict an important claim that he makes in the *Refutation of Idealism*, where he writes as follows.

Idealism assumed that the only immediate experience is inner experience, and that from that outer things could only be *inferred*, but, as in any case in which one infers from given effects to *determinate* causes, only unreliably . . . Yet here it is proved that outer experience is really immediate. (B276)

Here Kant explicitly denies that we infer our knowledge of external objects from knowledge of our own inner states (ideas or representations), and thus explicitly denies that he is committed to indirect realism. Secondly, the interpretation of Kant as having an idealist model of object representation – and thus as holding that our knowledge of the objective world reduces to knowledge of our internal representations – seems inconsistent with his repeated fervent denials that he is an empirical idealist like Berkeley. Furthermore, whilst Berkeley at least offers some sketches for how such an idealist reduction might proceed, there is nothing equivalent to be found in

¹² See P. Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), ch. 10. The quote is from p. 246.

¹³ J. Bennett, *Kant's Analytic* (Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 22.

Kant's text.¹⁴ Hence, both the indirect realist and the idealist interpretations seem to conflict with salient features of the *Critique*. This does not mean that there are no ways of dealing with these apparent conflicts, for the secondary literature offers many such attempts. But it does suggest that it is worth looking for a reading of Kant's notion of representation that avoids having to deal with those conflicts in the first place.

In summary, the position reached so far is as follows. A representationalist epistemology needs to give an account of our awareness of independent reality that is consistent with the claim that the only immediate objects of our awareness are the mind's internal representations. What I called the 'indirect realist' model saw the key to this account as lying in an act of *inference* to the external cause of the idea. What I called the 'idealist' model saw the key as lying in an act of *construction*, in which representations were linked together. I have suggested that there are reasons to believe that Kant rejects both the indirect realist and the idealist model of representation. My interpretative hypothesis is that Kant sees the key to an account of representation as lying in an act of *synthesis*, which is something crucially different from both inference and construction. It is a model that allows him to hold consistently that representations are the immediate objects of our awareness, and that our knowledge of an independent reality is neither inferred from nor reduced to our knowledge of those representations. The crucial point for understanding this is to see that for Kant the 'determinations' or 'modifications' of the mind constitute the *representational medium*, which must not be assimilated with the object represented *in* that medium. In the following section I attempt to explain what this means.

SEEING THINGS IN PICTURES

In order to fill out and clarify my interpretative hypothesis, I will consider what it is to see something in a picture, and will show how this can help provide us with a clear and intuitive model for understanding Kant's notion of representation. In the case of pictures, the representational medium is various spatial configurations of marks on a page, rather than certain 'determinations' or 'modifications' of the mind. Nonetheless, I hope to show that it is an analogy worth pursuing. Before I begin, it should also be emphasised that nothing in what follows is intended to be an *explanation* of the notion of representation, pictorial or otherwise – if this means a

¹⁴ For a useful summary of the evidence against assimilating Kant to Berkeley, see S. Gardner, *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 271–8.

reduction of it to non-representational notions. As mentioned above, Kant uses the notion of representation as a primitive, which suggests that he thinks of it as a ground-floor property of the mental and in no need of reductive explanation. Hence we can expect Kant to be exploiting in his own discussions the conceptual resources contained in our ordinary notion of representation. The central point of the discussion in this section is to emphasise that those resources can provide Kant with a richer notion of representation (and thus a richer notion of what it is to be conscious of a representation) than that which is at work in the indirect realist and idealist models of cognition discussed above.¹⁵

In discussing pictorial representation, it will help to have a concrete example of a picture before us. So here is one:



This is a picture of a smiling face. We could say, ‘These black dots here are eyes, this curved line is a mouth’, and so forth. So much is obvious. We might then ask, ‘What is the relation between the collection of lines and dots on the page and the smiling face?’ But this question is potentially misleading, and any talk of there being a relation here between two things does not make for clarity. For the smiling face is not a separate object that lies ‘behind’ or ‘outside of’ the configuration of lines and dots. That is, the configuration of lines and dots is not like a signpost that points beyond itself to some further object (i.e., the smiling face). Nor is the configuration of lines and dots as it were evidence for, or a natural sign of, the smiling face. For I do not *infer* to the smiling face from the lines and dots, as a doctor might infer the presence of a certain bacterial infection from a rash on the skin. For the smiling face is precisely *in* the picture.

If the smiling face is therefore not something lying beyond the picture, which the configuration of lines and dots goes proxy for, then it might be suggested that the face in the picture is identical to the configuration (or to some part thereof). But this suggestion will not do either. For example, the face in the picture is smiling, but the configuration of lines and dots is not smiling – for that is nonsensical. The configuration is composed of ink

¹⁵ My discussion is highly indebted to R. Pitkänen, ‘The Resemblance View of Pictorial Representation’, *British Journal of Aesthetics* 16 (1976), 313–23, and to two papers by H. Ishiguro: ‘Imagination – II’, *Aristotelian Society (Supplement)* 41 (1967), 37–56, and ‘On Representations’, *European Journal of Philosophy* 2 (1994), 109–24.

marks on paper, but the face is not composed of ink marks on paper – it is composed of eyes, a nose and a mouth. Therefore the face in the picture and the configuration of lines and dots on the page are not identical. A two-dimensional depiction of a three-dimensional object makes this fact even more obvious (and on this, see the discussion of the cube below). A more general way of putting this point is that the ‘is’ of representation is not the ‘is’ of identity; similarly, the ‘in’ of ‘the face is in the picture’ is not the ‘in’ of physical inclusion.¹⁶ This is most manifestly true if the picture is of an existing thing. For example, it is clear that the Prime Minister is not *in* the Parliament House in the same way that he is *in* a photo of the Prime Minister that appears in a newspaper.

There are thus two points that need to be held on to. Firstly, the phrase ‘the smiling face’ as I have used it here concerns only something *in* the picture and not something outside of the picture (it is, e.g., obvious that the picture I gave above is not a picture of a particular, existing smiling face – such as the Prime Minister’s). Secondly, in using the phrase ‘the smiling face’ I am not talking about the ink marks on the page, but about what is presented by those ink marks. We could sum up these two points by saying that the picture above does not stand proxy for something outside of itself, but rather *presents* something to us *off its own bat* – or ‘*auf eigene Faust*’, as Wittgenstein has it.¹⁷ Kant’s German term for ‘representation’ captures this sense nicely, for a *Vor-Stellung* is literally a *before-putting*. (This is different from the German term ‘*Repräsentation*’, which tends to carry the sense of one thing going proxy for another.) The configuration of lines and dots above – the representational medium – precisely serves to put a smiling face before us. As a matter of terminology, it is worth pointing out that where I have used the phrase ‘the smiling face’ I could also have used more general phrases like ‘what is in the picture’, ‘the depicted object’ or, more portentously, ‘the intentional object of the picture’. As I use them here, these phrases are independent of any questions about the existence of anything over and above the existence of the picture. That is, to say that there is a such-and-such in a picture does not entail that there exists a such-and-such; it entails only that there exists a picture of a such-and-such. But the crucial point is that this latter statement says a good deal more

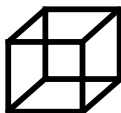
¹⁶ On the ‘is’ of representation, see H. Ishiguro, ‘Representation: An Investigation Based on a Passage in the *Tractatus*’, in *Forms of Representation*, ed. B. Freed *et al.* (Amsterdam: North Holland Publishing, 1975), pp. 189–202. On the ‘in’ of ‘in the picture’, see V. C. Aldrich, ‘Mirrors, Pictures, Words, Perceptions’, in *New Representationalisms*, ed. E. Wright (Aldershot: Avebury, 1993), pp. 117–35.

¹⁷ L. Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914–1916*, 2nd edn (University of Chicago Press, 1979), entry for 15 November 1914.

than just that there exists a certain configuration of ink marks on a page. For a picture is not a mere cluster of ink marks that may or may not stand in relation to some further thing – it is not ‘flat’ or ‘dead’ in this way, but rather a ‘before-putting’ in the sense I have tried to make clear.

The point of repeating these truisms here is to show that our concept of pictorial representation has a certain richness about it, in that it embodies a distinction between the representational medium (i.e., the configuration of lines and dots) and the depicted object (i.e., what is in the picture). My interpretative hypothesis is that we should read Kant as insisting upon the importance of this distinction in the case of mental representations as well. It is, I suggest, because he is making use of a richer conception of representation that he can avoid having to choose between an indirect realist and an idealist model of cognition. The notion of mental representation at work in those models of cognition is of something that is effectively ‘flat’ or ‘dead’, in that it does not present something ‘off its own bat’. Using a different sort of language, this is to say that such models neglect the intentionality of sensation.¹⁸

I will try to explain this by taking the example of visual representations. In this case, collapsing the notion of the depicted object into the notion of the representational medium produces the familiar concept of a ‘mental image’, the *esse* of which is *percipi*. Take, for instance, another simple picture:



In the standard early modern representationalist accounts of visual perception, the mind is thought of as being immediately aware of representations that are two-dimensional ‘mental images’ like this.¹⁹ On the indirect realist model of cognition, the two-dimensional image provides part of the evidential basis upon which the mind makes judgments (i.e., inferences) about the three-dimensional cube in the external world. On the idealist model of cognition (i.e., Berkeley’s model), the two-dimensional image is associated with (or ‘suggests’) various tactual ideas, so as to make up a complex idea that constitutes the three-dimensional cube.

Both the indirect realist and idealist models of cognition thus share a conception of what is available for immediate apprehension by the mind, and this conception is the product of collapsing the distinction between

¹⁸ See Anscombe, ‘Intentionality of Sensation’, *passim*.

¹⁹ See, e.g., Hatfield and Epstein, ‘Sensory Core’.

representational medium and depicted object. That is, the models have no conception of a representation as something that ‘presents off its own bat’ (in the sense discussed above). Hence, a mental representation becomes something that is apprehended and then must either be thought of in relation to some further object through an act of inference (in the indirect realist model), or thought of as partially constituting the object itself (in the idealist model). But if instead the distinction between medium and depicted object is maintained, then a different account of representation can be given. In the analogous case of the above picture, rather than simply having a two-dimensional image available for apprehension, we have the following: a representational medium (i.e., a certain configuration of ink marks) that is indeed (effectively) two-dimensional, and also a three-dimensional object (i.e., a cube) *in* or *presented by* the representational medium. In other words, seeing the picture is not a question of simply apprehending the representational medium, but of seeing something *in* the medium. It is something analogous to this act of ‘seeing in’ that is the key to Kant’s account of representation – that is, its equivalent with respect to the reflexive grasp of mental representations, namely, the act Kant calls ‘synthesis’. I want to suggest that it is this act of synthesis that replaces the acts of inference and construction that play the crucial role in the indirect realist and idealist models.

Before going on to discuss this notion of ‘seeing in’, it is worth saying something about what may lie behind the ‘flattening’ of the notion of representation that is characteristic of the indirect realist and idealist models of cognition. When considering representation, it is very tempting to treat it from a third-person rather than from a first-person perspective, and then the crucial notion of ‘presenting off its own bat’ tends to be lost from view. To think of representation from a third-person perspective is to have a model like this before one’s eyes:

Mind → Representation → 

Given such a model, it is natural to ask how the mind gets from the representation to the object – how it breaks through the ‘veil of ideas’ to the world beyond. An obvious choice is via an act of inference, as in the indirect realist view. The idealist view, on the other hand, argues that the problem is unreal because there is nothing beyond the representations: the supposed ‘veil’ is in fact reality itself. As I have argued, what is common to both of these views is the conception of a representation as something ‘flat’, rather than as a ‘before-putting’ or ‘*Vor-Stellung*’. The model above makes such a

view almost irresistible, but this model is from the perspective of someone who is, as it were, observing another person representing a cat. If instead one takes up a first-person perspective (i.e., of the subject that has the representation), then what one has is simply this:



In this case the questions one will be led naturally to ask are rather different from the former case. They will concern not how the mind can get from one thing (the representation) to another thing (the cat), but how the representation functions to *present* the object *to oneself*. This is one reason why it is worth taking seriously Kant's remark in the first-edition Paralogisms that 'it is obvious that if one wants to represent a thinking being, one must put oneself in its place, and thus substitute one's own subject for the object one wants to consider' (A354). Since the *Critique* is itself a representation of a thinking being (or, more precisely, is a representation of the cognising human mind in general), Kant's remark is an instruction for reading the book. By following this instruction and taking up a first-person perspective we will, to put things in more Kantian language, be led to consider what is involved in something being able to appear to us *in* our representations, and thus 'become an object for us'.

I now return to take up the main thread of my discussion. I argued above that the awareness of a representation (as a 'before-putting') will involve not simply an apprehension of the representational medium, but also an act of seeing something in that medium. One way of clarifying this notion of 'seeing in' is by using the Aristotelian jargon of 'matter' and 'form'. I am not claiming that this fits with Kant's own use of that distinction (which appears in a bewildering variety of contexts in the *Critique*); only that it may help to make clearer what I am saying. In a hylomorphic analysis of pictorial representation, the representational medium (i.e., the ink marks in their spatial arrangement) could be called the *matter*. It could then be said that to see the depicted object (e.g., the smiling face or the cube) in that spatial arrangement of ink marks is not to apprehend an object separate from the medium, but rather to see those lines and dots as *informed* in a certain way. This may help one to think of the connection between the representational medium and the depicted object in the correct way, and not as two separate things in a relation.²⁰

²⁰ W. Charlton makes a similar use of the matter-form distinction in *Aesthetics* (London: Hutchinson, 1970), ch. 3.

A comparison with the notion of seeing a meaningful gesture (such as a greeting or an insult) may also help in this respect. An account of this in the Cartesian style would run something like this. We begin with the seeing of a physical movement of a body in space. Identifying this as the meaningful, purposive action of a person then becomes a matter of identifying a certain mental occurrence (an intention or an act of will) as the efficient cause of that movement. In this way, seeing the movement as meaningful becomes an *inference*, an attempt to identify by hypothesis a hidden, mental cause that we postulate to lie behind the mere physical movement (which is all that is immediately accessible to us). Such a view is thus analogous to what I have called the 'indirect realist' model. We could also imagine a reductive empiricist analysis, which would run something like this. Again we begin with the seeing of a mere physical movement, but associate or connect it with various other actual and possible movements and such like, and thus enrich it into the complex notion of a voluntary act. Such an account would thus be analogous to what I have called the 'idealist' model. It will be noticed that both share the assumption that all that is available for immediate observation is a 'mere physical movement'. A hylomorphic analysis, on the other hand, is an attempt to recapture the realism that has disappeared in these Cartesian and empiricist accounts.²¹ On a hylomorphic account, the intention does not lie hidden behind the physical movement, nor is talk of intention simply an abbreviated way of talking about complex patterns of physical movements. Rather, the intention is thought of as *embodied in* the physical movement (the matter of the gesture), or as *informing* it. A gesture is, as we might say, 'filled with meaning'. We thus see the intention *in* the physical movement. In other words, the hylomorphic view holds that the Cartesian and empiricist models involve an impoverished conception of what is accessible to immediate observation. I want to suggest that, in an analogous fashion, Kant has a much richer conception of what is available to the mind in its reflexive grasp of its own representations than do the indirect realist and idealist versions of representationalism.

This appeal to the distinction between matter and form, and the comparison with seeing a meaningful action, has I hope helped to clarify further the closely connected notions of 'presenting off its own bat' and 'seeing in'. They were another way of making the point that seeing a configuration of lines as, for example, presenting a face (i.e., seeing the face in the picture),

²¹ Cf. J. Haldane, 'A Return to Form in the Philosophy of Mind', in *Form and Matter*, ed. D. S. Oderberg (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 59.

is not an act of making an inference about something that lies behind or beyond the picture, but nor is it a matter of *merely* seeing a configuration of lines. In order to see the depicted object in the picture we must of course apprehend the matter – that is, the lines and dots in their spatial arrangement. But this is not sufficient, for we must also grasp the form – that is, see those lines as presenting something to us.

To say that apprehending the configuration of ink marks is not sufficient for seeing the object in the picture follows from the earlier point that the depicted object is not identical to that configuration, but it is worth emphasising. Looking at the two examples of pictures that I gave previously, we can imagine a person who was aware of all the lines and dots standing in their spatial arrangement, but yet who failed to see the face or the cube in those lines and dots (i.e., who was unable to see that the configuration composed a picture of a face or of a cube). We could imagine that person able to draw an identical copy of each picture – that is, able to produce a spatial configuration of ink marks that was indistinguishable from the original – thus demonstrating that she had accurately apprehended that configuration in all its details. Yet that person would be bewildered by (could make no sense of) any remarks about the face or the cube in the picture. No doubt the two pictures used above are so simple and familiar that this failure to see what was in them would probably strike us as very odd. However, in the case of more complex pictures such an occurrence is not so uncommon. The difference between merely seeing the picture as a collection of ink marks and seeing what is in the picture is made especially clear in the case of trick pictures, in which a face, for example, may be hidden in a tangle of lines. In such cases we may need to have things explained to us – ‘You see, this line here is the nose and these the eyes’, before we ‘get it’ and see the face.²²

In these cases that I have imagined, a person has failed to see the depicted object, yet she has not failed to apprehend any aspect of the representational medium. That is, there are no lines, dots, patches of colour, or whatever, that she has failed to see, nor has she failed to see the spatial configuration in which they stand. Using the hylomorphic jargon, it could be said that she has thus apprehended the matter of the picture, but has failed to grasp its form. This situation could also be described by using some Kantian jargon. It seems quite natural to say of this person that what she is suffering from is not a failure of *receptivity*, for there is nothing wrong with her eyesight, nor is there anything obscuring her vision. Rather, what she is suffering from is

²² Cf. Wittgenstein’s discussion of ‘aspect seeing’ in *Philosophical Investigations*, part 2, § xi.

a failure of *imagination* – where I am using this word in the original (and Kantian) sense of a capacity for ‘image-making’ (i.e., ‘*Einbildungskraft*’). We could also say of such a person that she is *blind* to something that lies before her, but that her blindness is not a defect of receptivity but of imagination.

There is, in other words, a conceptual gap between simply apprehending the representational medium (the lines and dots in their spatial arrangement) and actually seeing what is in it (the depicted object). But, as I hope my discussion in this section has made clear, what bridges that conceptual gap is not an act of inference from the configuration of lines and dots to some further object that lies outside of them (in the manner of indirect realism). Nor is it an act of constructing or compounding a complex of lines and dots (in the manner of idealism). Rather, it is an imaginative act of seeing something *in* the configuration of lines and dots.

This concludes my discussion of the notion of ‘seeing things in pictures’. In it, I have briefly attempted to do two things. Firstly, I have attempted to draw out some of the conceptual resources in our ordinary notion of representation (or, at least, of pictorial representation). Secondly, I have attempted to suggest how those resources may allow for the construction of an account of mental representation that differs in important ways from both the indirect realist and idealist models. In the next section I start to fill out my interpretative hypothesis that Kant is making use of just such an account of representation.

REPRESENTATION AND SYNTHESIS

In the first section of this chapter it was emphasised that Kant, like most of the major philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was a representationalist. That is, he held that the immediate objects of consciousness or awareness were the mind’s internal representations or ideas. For Kant, in cognition these internal representations are modifications or determinations of the mind’s sensibility (i.e., of its capacity for receptivity). I now turn to explore some of the consequences of marrying this basically Cartesian model to the conception of representation outlined in the previous section. Once again I should emphasise that in this chapter I am simply making a hypothesis about Kant’s notion of representation rather than arguing for its truth. Although I consider here the occasional passage from the *Critique*, the real evidence for my interpretation will come in the following chapters, through a demonstration of its capacity to make good sense of the main argument of the B-Deduction.

A useful way of approaching these matters is to return to my earlier analogy, in which the representationalist cognising subject was compared to a viewer placed inside a hollow opaque globe of soft plastic. The globe (sensibility) takes on various shapes (modifications) in response to external forces (independent reality), and these shapes are observed from within by the viewer (are grasped reflexively by the mind). Let us now modify this analogy slightly, and think of the external forces as resulting in a cartoon film being projected on the inside of the globe. That is, available for the viewer's observation is a sequence of various arrangements of colour patches. However, the viewer does not merely see a sequence of colour patches, but rather sees a cartoon story, with various characters engaged in various actions (e.g., Wile E. Coyote engaged in dastardly plots to catch the Road-Runner, etc.). That is, the spatially arranged colour patches (the modifications of sensibility) make up the representational medium, and the viewer does not simply apprehend the patches, but sees things *in* them. Hence, on a model of representation like this the cognising mind is immediately conscious of its own modifications, but this reflexive grasp is not a grasp of them simply as internal modifications, but as representations. Crucially, this involves neither an inference nor a constructive act, but rather an exercise of the imagination akin to the act of 'seeing in' discussed above.

As already mentioned, part of my general interpretative hypothesis is that this exercise of the imagination is what Kant calls 'synthesis' or 'combination', and I shall use this terminology henceforth. Kant's explicit definition of synthesis is as follows.

By *synthesis* in the most general sense, however, I understand the action of putting different representations together with each other and comprehending [*begreifen*] their manifoldness in one cognition. (A77/B103)

This definition is, taken by itself, compatible with many different accounts. This includes the common view that synthesis is a process in which mental entities are put into relations with one another, and wholes thus formed out of parts. Such a conception of synthesis assimilates it to the constructive acts involved in the idealist model of cognition. However, the term '*begreifen*' in the passage suggests that Kant thinks of synthesis as primarily an act of comprehending or understanding something. This in turn indicates that the 'putting together' or 'combining' that is mentioned should be understood in a metaphorical sense. My hypothesis is thus that the act of synthesis involved in cognition is the act of grasping the object presented in the representational medium (the modifications of the mind). As such, it is analogous to the act of seeing the depicted object (such as the smiling

face) in a picture – the act of comprehending the configuration of lines and dots by seeing what it depicts. Hence, through synthesis the mind grasps its representations as representing things, and not simply as its own modifications.

This talk of being aware of a representation ‘as representing’ rather than merely ‘as a modification of the mind’ is closely related to the important Cartesian distinction between the formal and the objective reality of an idea.²³ Descartes famously distinguished between ideas ‘considered simply as modes of thought’ (i.e., considered with respect to their formal reality) and ‘considered as images which represent different things’ (i.e., considered with respect to their objective reality).²⁴ In Kant’s hands, I suggest, this becomes the distinction between sensation (*Empfindung*) and intuition (*Anschauung*). I will briefly consider these two notions in turn.

Near the beginning of the *Critique*, Kant writes that an intuition is ‘that through which [cognition] relates immediately to [objects]’ (A19/B33). By this I suggest Kant means simply that it is in virtue of my grasping an intuition that an object is presented to me as if it were here before me at this very moment. In other words, the reflexive grasp of intuitions is involved in perceiving something, rather than merely thinking about it in its absence. As Charles Parsons puts it, ‘immediacy for Kant is direct, phenomenological presence to the mind, as in perception’.²⁵ This ‘immediacy’ is thus the same phenomenological quality of an experience which Hume appeals to when talking of the greater ‘vivacity’ possessed by an impression over an idea. The presence of this quality is decided on the basis of (to borrow Nagel’s useful phrase) what it is like to have that experience – that, after all, is the point of calling it ‘phenomenological’. It is thus that Kant writes in the *Prolegomena* that ‘an intuition is a representation of the sort which *would* depend immediately on the presence of an object’ (4:281; my emphasis). It should be noted that Kant uses the subjunctive ‘would’ (*würde*) in this statement, rather than the indicative. This is because it is in virtue of grasping one’s intuitions that one has experiences in which it seems *as if* something were present to one’s senses (i.e., putative perceptual experiences). The use of ‘as if’ here is to emphasise that an experience can possess this property of immediacy independently of whether or not there really is

²³ The importance of this distinction for Kant’s philosophy is emphasised by W. Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics* (Atascadero: Ridgeview, 1992), p. 31.

²⁴ R. Descartes, *Third Meditation* in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. J. Cottingham *et al.* (Cambridge University Press, 1985–91), vol. II, pp. 27–8.

²⁵ C. Parsons, ‘The Transcendental Aesthetic’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, ed. P. Guyer (Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 66.